



## **MINUTES**

### **BOARD OF EQUAL RIGHTS COMMISSIONERS**

**June 20<sup>th</sup> 2018, at 2:30pm**

**Room 301-B, City Hall, 200 E. Wells Street Milwaukee, WI 53202**

#### **Present:**

Commissioner Jeffery Roman, Chair  
Commissioner Chez Ordonez, Vice-Chair  
Commissioner Tony Snell  
Commissioner Mayhoua Moua  
Commissioner Sheila Ashley

Commissioner Jennifer Bennett  
Commissioner Reggie Jackson  
Commissioner Martha Collins  
Commissioner Nathan Guequierre

Sharon Robinson, Director, Dept. of Administration  
Jessica Langill, Dept. of Administration  
Diane Lopez, Dept. of Administration  
Victoria Lockhart, Intern, Dept. of Administration  
Brian Peterson, IndependenceFirst

The meeting was called to order at 2:36pm

#### ***1. Approval of Minutes from May 16<sup>th</sup> Meeting***

Commissioner Ordonez called the meeting to order. Commissioner Snell moved to approve the minutes, Commissioner Mayhoua seconded. No objections.

#### ***2. Department of Administration's Role with ERC and Strategic Planning Update (DOA Director, Sharon Robinson)***

Director Sharon Robinson stated that she wanted to present to the ERC to give the new members information on the role of the Department of Administration. She stated that DOA is available to offer staffing, strategic advice, and resources. Director Robinson stated that the mission of the ERC ties to the broader city goals brought about the Mayor's strategic planning, such as inclusion and equal rights efforts. She stated DOA is responsible for supporting all mission delivery and service goals, planning and policy management, and helping to advance the city's goals. She stated she also works closely with the Mayor.

Director Robinson shared the vision statement of Milwaukee: a place where opportunity is abundant and accessible to all. She stated that they are aware that city government can't operate alone and must rely on community partners. She stated that all city departments must abide by 6 guiding goals that are used to create yearly measurable strategic objectives. The 5<sup>th</sup> goal, "promoting racial, social, and economic equity," aligns closely with the work of the ERC.

Since 2005 DOA has run the Milwaukee Fatherhood Initiative which has helped over 10,000 fathers restore driver's license privileges, pay down child support, etc. DOA also started the Black Male Achievement Advisory Council and has been a big proponent of the National League of Cities. In 2014 Mayor Barrett signed on to President Obama's My Brother's Keeper Action Plan – which presents some synergies in which the ERC could work together. DOA also works with the Office of African American Affairs and the Citywide Savings Account Initiative.

Director Robinson stated that the ERC was originally staffed by the Department of Employee Relations, but was moved to DOA in 2015 to ramp up inclusion and equal rights efforts. The Equal Rights Specialist position was added in the 2015 budget. DOA also added the Community Engagement and Achievement Collaboration Manager position, which has a special focus to the Fatherhood Initiative, Black Male Achievement, and My Brother's Keeper. Director Robinson stated the Equal Rights Specialist position was brought about to staff the ERC and also work with the Community Development and Grants Department. The Equal Rights Specialist should focus on 3 major areas: enforcing housing and employment discrimination laws, working with neighborhoods to improve community relations and address equal rights, and creating more internal accountability within city government.

Director Robinson stated DOA and the City Attorney's Office is open and willing to offer advice and knows that it cannot make decisions for the ERC. She asked that the ERC work in partnership with DOA and notify DOA when lobbying for changes and funding. She reminded the ERC that they should do their best to work within their jurisdiction and remember that the Commissioners are appointed by the Mayor, who has the final authority over the ERC. She stated that together, DOA and the ERC can really work together to create a better Milwaukee.

Commissioner Ashley asked if the ERC is putting the cart before the horse with creating a commissioner handbook before having a strategic planning session. Director Robinson stated that a strategic planning session would be extremely helpful and she recommends it be done before creating any documents and other actions. Commissioner Ashley stated that she had great concerns about the commissioner handbook because it was created prior to strategic planning and did not take into consideration the feedback of all commissioners. She stated that if the ERC did not know what the collective mission and vision is, that they could not create documents and guidelines for the full Commission. She stated she wants to have a collective understanding of who the ERC is, frame the discussion, and allow input from all Commissioners.

Commissioner Ashley also brought up new leadership within the ERC, and stated that she would like to see the new commissioners consider taking on a leadership role, but that since the ERC does not have a collective identity, it would be hard for a new member to become a leader.

Commissioner Ordonez stated that the commissioner handbook is a moving document and would not be voted on today. It came from several full commission discussions and was drafted through the subcommittee. Commissioner Ashley stated she had not been invited to the subcommittee meetings and had not been included in any of the planning meetings for the handbook, even though she had been appointed to the subcommittee. Commissioner Ordonez stated that she had been invited, but had been unable to attend. Commissioner Ordonez stated the importance of having protocol in place as the Commission continues on. He stated all Commissioners need to be held to the same standard and understand their role on the Commission, which is reflected in the current draft of the handbook. He stated that the handbook has been modeled after other commissions that are similar to the ERC. Commissioner Ashley stated that the politics and realities of Milwaukee make it near impossible to mirror documents from other “like” cities.

Commissioner Ashley stated that she has been stopped on numerous occasions and asked how it was that the ERC came to represent only the needs of transgender individuals. She stated that when she came on the commission, the first thing that her and Commissioner Snell did was get movement on updating the ordinance so that the transgender community could have some sort of protection since it was not legally defined as a protected class in any jurisdiction. She stated that just because that was a focus at the time, it did not overshadow the needs of other protected classes. She stated how important it was for the ERC to address this reputation. Commissioner Ashley stated she did not feel comfortable going forward with any documents until the strategic planning session has been completed.

Commissioner Snell stated that the ERC needs to make sure they are not excluding any group of people and that while the ERC has a certain jurisdiction, everyone in the city of Milwaukee should feel that they are being heard and considered. He stated that silence about certain communities and issues shows these communities that they are not being considered by the city. Commissioner Snell asked if there are any racial equity tools or measurables that the departments have to use to prove that they are meeting the guidelines. She stated that there are a lot of guidelines that each department must follow in order to show that they are meeting all 6 racial equity guidelines. She also stated that DOA would be happy to work with the ERC to create more guidelines to be used and that the ERC is mandated to hold the city accountable.

Director Robinson stated that DOA and CDBG wanted to fund the ERC’s strategic planning session because they think it is extremely important. She stated that DOA and the ERC are on the same page and she is looking forward to fleshing out how the ERC can be more impactful. Commissioner Snell stated it was extremely important to move forward on the strategic planning session and that a complaint process needs to be worked out as soon as possible so people know that they can come to the ERC with their complaints. Director Robinson stated it would be important to have a professional lead the commission through the strategic planning session. She asked the commission to send Jessica Langill recommendations for a facilitator. Commissioner Ashley suggested that we look into a grant from the Milwaukee Foundation.

Commissioner Collins asked how often the city updates their strategic plan. Director Robinson stated that it is reviewed every year around budget time and that there is accountability and management program in which the Mayor tracks all managers and makes sure goals and objectives are being met. Commissioner Collins asked if there was any way to get community input on the strategic plan. Director Robinson stated that a few key community members were included in the Mayor's strategic plan for the city. Commissioner Guequierre asked if the new Commissioners could get information on previous community listening sessions to be included for discussion in the strategic planning session.

Commissioner Guequierre asked what the next steps were with the strategic planning session. Jessica Langill asked that Commissioners send their facilitator recommendations by June 25<sup>th</sup>. She would then reach out to the recommended facilitators for a cost analysis. Director Robinson stated that DOA had put together a scope of services. She said that she could also look internally for a facilitator. Commissioner Ordonez suggested that DOA take the reins on finding and choosing a facilitator. Commissioner Jackson agreed that DOA should select the vendor and then the ERC should all attend the session and get the process going as soon as possible. Commissioner Roman asked that the process include a 3-phase process that would include work as a Commission, community involvement, and tying it all together. He stated that a single session would most likely not be sufficient to include it all.

Commissioner Ordonez suggested that DOA should consider the diversity of the commission when choosing the facilitator. Commissioner Ashley stated that DOA should request a resume and list of other groups that the facilitator has worked with. Commissioner Ordonez asked that DOA not only consider affordability when finding a facilitator, but that they make sure the selected facilitator is of quality as well. Commissioner Guequierre stated he had some reservations about using a city staff person as a facilitator.

### ***3. Discussion and Statement on Immigration***

Commissioner Ordonez thanked Director Robinson and the City Attorney's Office for advising the ERC on their jurisdiction regarding immigration. He also stated that the ERC would be remised if it did not speak on the important issues that may not be within the ERC's jurisdiction. Commissioner Ordonez stated that immigration is a federal issue, but also a human issue, and therefore should be addressed by the ERC. He stated that the ERC should not feel as though it must shy away from issues.

Commissioner Ordonez stated that the city council had just put out a joint statement regarding immigration: "Separating Families at the Border is Inhumane and Unnecessary." He also stated that Commissioner Bennett and himself had put together a draft statement regarding the separation of families. He shared the draft statement with the Commissioners and asked for feedback. Commissioner Snell stated that the ERC is around to respond to the fears of all people in the city and that it is extremely important to make a firm statement. Commissioner Bennett moved to discuss the statement, Commissioner Snell seconded.

Commissioner Roman asked what the city attorneys' office advised regarding putting out a statement about immigration. Jessica Langill stated that the city attorney's office wanted to remind the ERC that immigration is not in the ERC's jurisdiction to act on and that Chapter 109 does not cover immigration issues. Commissioner Roman asked if anything had come out of the Mayor's Office and Jessica Langill stated a statement had not been made yet. Commissioner Ashley suggested that the ERC put out their statement and then ask the Mayor to share the statement with his media people.

Commissioner Snell stated that President Trump had just put out an Executive Order that would cease the practice of separating families at the border, so he was not sure if the Mayor's office would feel the need to issue a statement. Commissioner Bennett stated she wanted to put out a statement through the ERC because she wanted the community to know that the ERC recognizes that this is a serious issue and that they agree it is inhumane and unacceptable. Commissioner Ordonez stated that the ERC would put out their statement and then ask the Mayor's office to share it or put out a statement from the Mayor's Office. Commissioner Ashley presented some edits to the statement and moved to amend it. Commissioner Snell seconded the amended statement with no objections. Commissioner Roman moved to adopt the statement with no objections. Director Robinson stated she would get the statement out to the Mayor's Office and ask if they can also send it out as a press release.

Director Robinson stated she would like to see more statements coming from the ERC. Commissioner Snell stated that the strategic planning session would help solidify a process for issuing statements. Jessica Langill stated that in the past, any Commissioner was invited to write a statement, and that it would be sent to the chair and vice-chair for approval and issued without a full commission vote.

#### ***4. Nomination and Election of Chair and Vice-Chair***

Commissioner Ordonez stated that the floor was open to discussion, recommendations, and/or nominations. He stated that if someone nominates a Commissioner, the Commissioner would need to accept the nomination before being considered. Once nominations are voiced, a roll-call vote would be taken.

Commissioner Ashley asked if there was a way that the ERC put off elections until the new Commissioners were more familiar with everything. Commissioner Roman stated that he requested a vote be taken for new leadership because his term ended in February and he would like to be able to leave. He also stated that the ordinance states that an election for chair and vice-chair are supposed to happen at the beginning of each new year. He stated that now that the ERC has a full commission it is time for new leadership. He stated that he is willing to stay until a reappointment is made for his seat, but that he would very much like new leadership to be appointed as soon as possible.

Commissioner Ashley stated that there is no real hurry for a new chair and vice-chair to be appointed. She stated that she wished someone from the new commissioners would allow

themselves to be considered for a leadership role. She stated that she is not making a pitch for herself, but that she is very hopeful that new commissioners will take on a leadership role. Commissioner Roman stated that he would not leave until an appointment is made, but that he thinks an election needs to take place to allow for the ERC to move forward. Commissioner Ordonez stated that he would like to open up the floor to see if there is anyone interested in taking on a leadership role. Commissioner Ashley motioned to wait until after the strategic planning process to hold a vote on chair and vice-chair. Commissioner Ordonez wanted to know if we were in violation of the ordinance by not appointing a new chair and vice-chair. Commissioner Ashley asked if the ERC could wait until Ben Roovers was able to provide guidance. Commissioner Ordonez stated that while he did not think there was a burning need to hold elections, that to respect the current chair that is looking for new leadership to step up it was important to keep moving forward. Commissioner Ashley stated that the ERC cannot be situational on how the rules are applied.

Commissioner Roman stated he would be interested in hearing from Ben Roovers about the limitations. He made a motion to table this agenda item until the July meeting to hear from Mr. Roovers. He stated after the July meeting, the ERC could decide when they wanted to hold the elections once they have heard from Mr. Roovers. Commissioner Ashley seconded. No objections.

## ***5. Commissioner Handbook***

Commissioner Snell moved to table this agenda item until after Strategic Planning session. Seconded by Commissioner Collins and Ashley. No objections.

## ***6. Listening Sessions***

Commissioner Snell suggested that the ERC go out to the immigrant community and do a listening session. He stated it was important to bring the voices to the city and that it was a timely listening session. Commissioner Ordonez agreed and suggested that staff start reaching out to community partners to find a location. He proposed that we do the listening session as we have done in the past, taking the place of the monthly meeting and allowing a small amount of time at the beginning for official commission business. The list of potential community partners included UMOS, Voces, SOC, Centro Hispano, LULAC, the Hispanic Chamber of Commerce, and the United Community Center. Commissioner Snell requested that Patricia Ruiz-Cantu reach out to all of the organizations. Commissioner Ordonez suggested that we do the session in July if possible.

Commissioner Ashley stated that she would like Jessica Langill to get the strategic planning session tasks completed before she focused on planning the listening session. She also made a motion for Jessica Langill to look into completing a grant through the Milwaukee Foundation to pay for the listening session so that the city would not have to go through a procurement process. Commissioner Bennett seconded. No objections. Director Robinson stated that Patricia Ruiz-Cantu would be willing to work with Jessica Langill on setting up the listening session.

## ***7. Community Dialogue & Upcoming Events***

Commissioner Bennett stated that on June 30<sup>th</sup>, there was a Families Belong Together protest at 517 E. Wisconsin Ave (Senator Ron Johnson's Milwaukee office). Commissioner Roman stated that the Milwaukee Urban Autism Summit was being held on Saturday, June 23rd at Penfield Elementary School. Commissioner Guequierre recommended the commission take part in the city-wide book read, "The Color of Law." He stated the book is about how segregation has been institutionalized. He stated the UEDA website had a list of discussion groups. Commissioner Jackson stated that it was extremely important for people to understand how segregation came about and how the city got to where we are.

## ***8. Next Meeting Date: July 18<sup>th</sup>, 2018 (possible listening session)***

## ***11. Adjourn***

Meeting adjourned at 4:54 p.m.

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